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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8688
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1169
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2346
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0816
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0789
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1263
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000506

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADERS ON THE FUTURE OF THE FNDD

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 504

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Boulware for reasons 1.4(c) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Front National pour la Defense de la Democratie (FNDD) is still active despite its electoral defeat and the defection of founding party Tawassoul. Leaders Mohamed Ould Maouloud and Abdel Koudouss Abeidna believe the FNDD has a future as an umbrella organization for opposition parties that reject the election results and the new regime. Moving forward, the FNDD is requesting the government investigate electoral fraud and open up political dialogue to guarantee Mauritania's democratic future. President-elect Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz's government will be marked by authoritarianism and a combat between democratic forces and populism, Maouloud claims. According to Abeidna, the FNDD will become a magnet for all those disappointed with Aziz. He is convinced that Aziz needs to change to stay in power but believes he is fundamentally incapable of change. Abeidna insists the possibility Aziz will be deposed by a coup d'etat is real. The FNDD's strategy of requesting a fraud investigation seems unrealistic and its leaders appear to be avoiding the real question of the benefits of participation versus boycott. End summary.

MAOULOUD: WE WERE HAD

¶2. (C) On July 29, PolOff met with Union of the Forces of Progress (UFP) President and FNDD leader Maouloud to discuss the election results and future strategy. A despondent Maouloud greeted PolOff with a sad smile and a bitter "We were had!" He stated Aziz's first round victory had been a surprise to everybody. He blamed the election's outcome on the Dakar Accord, which he claims the pro-coup camp violated from the very beginning while the international community turned a blind eye to Aziz's manipulations. After going through the usual laundry list of grievances (ie. vote buying operations, electoral list irregularities, fake identity cards, etc.), Maouloud stated the next step for the FNDD is to request the government and the international community establish a commission to investigate electoral fraud. The FNDD will ask for a review of the electoral list and for the opening of ballots in order to recount votes in contested regions. Note: On July 28, the FNDD and RFD published a joint communique calling for the creation of an electoral investigation commission. The statement highlighted the resignation of National Independent Electoral Commission

(CENI) President Sid'Ahmed Ould Deye following the CENI's statements validating the results. Ould Deye said there was a doubt in his mind about the transparency of the election and, as a result, he could not in good conscience continue heading CENI. PolOff met with Ould Deye on July 30 and he explained the systematic nature of Aziz's victory in every Moughata had triggered doubts. "Out of 40 polling stations we counted on June 18, he won in each and every one of them with the same margins. The results kept arriving the next day, and they were identical in every polling station despite historical trends and tribal allegiances," stated Ould Deye who said he plans to go back to retirement and will not participate in the opposition. End comment.

13. (C) Maouloud said the opposition cannot accept the results as Aziz's fraudulent victory threatens Mauritania's democratic future, bringing the country back to a Taya-like situation in which a dictator will ensure his permanence in power through rigged elections. When asked whether he believed Aziz would dissolve parliament, Maouloud stated he could work with the current parliament and seek to control it or he could dissolve it to destroy the opposition and get rid of National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir.

14. (C) For Maouloud, Aziz's government will be a populist one and his presidency will be marked by a battle between the forces of populism and democracy. "There is no difference between Aziz and Chavez," he emphasized. Maouloud thinks Aziz could become more radical and try to pit the populace against the elite.

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15. (C) Maouloud said the FNDD will continue contesting the election results. "We will not use the same strategy we used before Dakar," he stated, saying they had lost faith in the international community as it had decided to legalize the coup d'etat. The International Contact Group (ICG) imposed very short deadlines, and supported unilateral actions as well as a badly planned election, he said. "We have no faith whatsoever in the Nouakchott-based ICG," stressed Maouloud. "The international community betrayed us. We lost everything -- our legitimacy, money and energy -- so in the end Aziz could consolidate his coup. The political crisis continues because Aziz was badly elected." Maouloud believes the only way for Aziz to achieve legitimacy is to address fraud accusations and work with the government to guarantee Mauritania's truly democratic future. Comment: PolOff met with Mauritanian anthropologist and tribal expert professor Yahya Ould Baraa on August 4. Baraa stated that despite the appearance of calm in Mauritanian society and acceptance of Aziz's victory, the political class and the tribes are in a state of disarray and there is widespread discontent with the election results. Baraa also believes another coup is possible (septel). End comment.

ABEIDNA: TIME IS OUR ALLY

16. (C) On August 2, PolOff met an equally embittered FNDD rotating President Abdel Koudouss Abeidna. Abeidna said the FNDD will meet on August 6 to discuss future strategy. When asked about the FNDD's future, Abeidna stated that the organization will transform itself from an anti-coup to an anti-fraud movement. He does not think the defection of founding leaders like Jemil Mansour will have a negative impact on the organization. On the contrary, said Abeidna, "now the Front will become a magnet for all of Aziz's enemies." Abeidna is convinced that disappointed Aziz supporters will come swell the ranks of the FNDD as soon as they realize Aziz cannot please everybody by giving them what they consider their right due. Abeidna doubts RFD's Ahmed Ould Daddah will join the government and sees him as a reliable opposition partner. He is also counting on Ely Mohamed Vall's support. Note: Vall stated in a press

conference on July 31 that Aziz's election was a coup d'etat through the ballot boxes and that the crisis continued. End note.

17. (C) When asked about the opposition's future in parliament and whether Daddah and Boulkheir's boycott of electoral results would precipitate a dissolution, Abeidna responded that a dissolution would be a good thing. He believes the opposition would win parliamentary seats if elections are called. PolOff pointed out the contradiction in his position in light of the election results but he dismissed it by stating: "This time the international community will not have us. You already dragged us once into a trap, we won't let you do it again. If the necessary conditions for parliamentary elections are not present, the opposition will boycott." If Aziz does not work with the opposition, he has no chances of surviving, stated Abeidna, while underlining that Aziz can only dissolve parliament twice.

18. (C) "We will be waiting for him around the corner," threatened Abeidna. In order to stay in power, he has to change but he is incapable of changing. There will be demonstrations and they will be repressed, stressed Abeidna. The Europeans have to choose between working with Aziz or with the Mauritanian people. Abeidna is convinced Aziz could be deposed through a coup d'etat as he has no legitimacy.

COMMENT

19. (C) Maouloud and Abeidna are in denial. The FNDD's request to open an investigation seems unrealistic. Even if Aziz decides to indulge, it is unlikely any significant fraud will be exposed. Aziz's camp has already expressed its strong rejection of this proposal (reftel). Also, despite

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the Swedish EU presidency's call for an investigation, it is unlikely the international community will continue investing time and resources in electoral fraud investigations in Mauritania. Many feel it is time to move on. The FNDD is faced with a tough choice: continue with a radical position of rejection or participating. For the moment, the FNDD does not seem open to giving Aziz the benefit of the doubt despite his August 3 calls on the opposition to join "the movement of change to work towards Mauritania's development and transformation into a place where each individual finds its rightful place in a transparent and fair manner." Confrontation seems to be the only way of ensuring the FNDD's political survival. The question now is how realistic and sustainable this logic can be in the long-term. End comment.

BOULWARE